





LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

Blunt, Talbot
THOUGHTS ON PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

Dec 1875
A SERMON

PREACHED AT SUTTON'S HOSPITAL
IN THE CHARTER-HOUSE,

ON FOUNDER'S DAY, 1875,

BY

EDWIN PALMER, M.A.

CORPUS PROFESSOR OF LATIN IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

Oxford and London:
JAMES PARKER AND CO.

1875.

THOUGHTS ON PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

ECCLES. xi. 1.

“CAST THY BREAD UPON THE WATERS: FOR THOU SHALT
FIND IT AFTER MANY DAYS.”

TO old Carthusians gathered in this chapel, on such an occasion as the present, two lines of thought inevitably present themselves,—the munificent design of the Founder, for whom we thank God to-day, and our own experience when we were schoolboys in that Founder's school. Let me follow each of these lines of thought a little way.

And first of the Founder and his institution. Whether we know much or little of Thomas Sutton's history, we know at least that he aimed at noble objects, and made a noble contribution towards those objects. His aim was to lighten the pressure of poverty on the old and on the young; to diminish the suffering which it entailed upon the former, to dispel the ignorance to which it condemned the latter. He was not deterred by the vast disproportion of any effort that he could make to the evils which he desired to meet. He “did what he could;” and he chose rather to do that little well, than to spoil the quality of his work by an ambitious attempt to extend its area. His poor brethren were to be relieved from the ills of poverty, effectually, and not in name only; his poor scholars were not only to be educated, but to be maintained while they received their education.

We have lived to see a time, when the wisdom of such institutions as Thomas Sutton's has been called in question. Charitable foundations, whether educational or not,

have been represented by men of ability and honesty, as mischievous to the common weal. For myself, I do not believe this doctrine to be true, even for the present day. I believe it to owe its origin, and any popularity that it can boast, to the abuses which have crept into the management of almost all foundations. I rejoice in the claim of the legislature to act as supreme visitor of all charities. In the existence of a supreme visitorial court, which can not only enforce law but amend it, I see the best guarantee which is attainable against abuses of every kind, the best guarantee which is attainable for the perpetual application of pious gifts and bequests to good and fruitful uses.

But, even if it were conceded, that in our own age charitable endowments are not needed, there would be no reason to believe that they were unnecessary in Thomas Sutton's generation, or for many generations after him. It was a real want in his own day which he strove to meet, and his efforts did not prove ineffectual. The burden of undeserved penury has been lightened for many poor men during the last two hundred and fifty years, many poor scholars have been trained in good learning, by help of those gifts which God gave to Thomas Sutton, and he deliberately gave back to God. "*Deo dante dedi.*" With regard to one part of his institution, the good done has probably been much larger than he himself anticipated. Round the forty scholars for whom he originally provided, has grown up one of those great schools which have long been, and still continue to be, notable centres of light for the whole of England. Like all other founders of schools which have attained a high degree of excellence,—like William of Wykeham, Henry the Sixth, Lawrence Sheriff, and the rest,—our own Sutton must be numbered by any man, who is not en-

slaved to a false theory, among the true benefactors of his country.

How far he forecast the important consequences which would flow from his provision for forty poor scholars, we cannot tell. There is one feature in his foundation, which might perhaps have been shaped otherwise, if he had forecast them;—a feature, which this chapel recalls vividly to all our minds. I mean the combination in one institution of boys and old men.

It was a noble idea, certainly, to embrace in a single scheme of charity old age and youth. I love and reverence Sutton's memory all the more, because he took thought at once for both ends of life,—for the age of hope and golden dreams, and for the age when hope—on this side of the grave—is well-nigh over. Myself a boy no longer, I can appreciate perhaps better than when I was a boy his tender care for old age. Nor am I insensible to the picturesqueness of the combination, which has often served as a topic for the youthful orators, who (while the school still remained in London) were called upon year by year to pronounce Sutton's panegyric. Yet here, in Sutton's chapel, I cannot but wish that from the first, the two parts of his institution had been, as they are now, established in different places.

Except for the chapel and its services, I should have no reason to entertain such a wish. Whether indeed the brothers of the Charter-house used to derive pleasure from the neighbourhood of young life, I know not. That the boys were sobered in any degree, or made more thoughtful, by the neighbourhood of old age, I have no reason to believe; certainly I have no such memory. And all Carthusians know that, in practice, young and old were completely separated; it was only in God's house that we met together. That we should meet in this place,

that we should join in the same prayers and hymns, that we should communicate, young and old, at the same altar, was surely (it may be said) no harm to either. Even if young and thoughtless minds did not realise the sentiment of such a conjunction, at least it could not harm them; nor could it harm the devotion of their elders.

All this, of course, is true; but there were two practical ways in which our common use of this chapel worked amiss. The chapel was a small one; the old men naturally and rightly occupied the central space in it. The foundation-boys were crowded together in a corner; the boarders, when provision came to be made for them, were ranged in more orderly fashion, but were ill-placed for sight and hearing. Boys require every help to devotion which can be given by the arrangements of the building in which they are assembled for public worship: in this chapel,—I hope I may say so without offence,—the arrangements were of necessity against them. An alteration, which I recal with thankfulness, was made in the gown-boys' seats after my time. I do not doubt that it was a considerable improvement. In my time, certainly, those seats were as ill-adapted for prayer as can be well imagined.

Inconveniences like these might have been remedied, no doubt, by the erection of a new chapel here on Thomas Sutton's ground. But the erection of a larger and better chapel would not have touched another evil consequence which flowed from the resort to one chapel of boys and pensioners. Prayers and sacraments are, it is true, the most important uses of a church; for men mature in age and in religion they are far more important than preaching. But for many men preaching is of great importance, for boys it is of peculiar importance. Our double foundation placed the preacher in a difficult posi-

tion : half his audience consisted of old men, half of boys. A sermon specially adapted to old men could hardly be fit for boys ; a sermon specially adapted to boys could hardly suit old men. Under such circumstances, it must always have been likely that one part of the congregation or the other would feel that little was done for its spiritual needs ; not improbable, that both would be dissatisfied. At all events, the pulpit could not be employed, like the pulpit of a mere school-chapel, with a constant view to the needs of young hearers.

Another incident of our foundation, not unconnected with its double character, intensified this evil. The preachers in this chapel were not Masters in the School. The foundation provided a Master for the Hospital ; a Schoolmaster and an Usher for the School ; and also (so ran the original scheme) "one learned and godly Preacher, to preach and teach the word of God to all, poor people and children, members and officers, at or in the house." It is far from my intention to disparage our Preachers ; but I will say, fearlessly, that their external position operated to diminish their power over their younger hearers. The ablest men, the most learned, the most pious, could hardly know the difficulties of school-boys like those who were toiling daily among them ; nor, as a rule, could the boys be expected to listen to such preachers with equal attention. In my time, certainly, the Charter-house pulpit, in spite of the ability and earnestness of the Preacher, gave no such impulse to the moral and spiritual life of the School, as the sermons of Moberly and Wordsworth were giving in those same years at Winchester, the sermons of Arnold at Rugby.

I dwell upon this thought, not to depreciate the sagacity or piety of our Founder, who assuredly did not intend

to neglect anything which could conduce to the religious training of his scholars; but because the place in which I stand brings it forcibly to my mind, and because it is one among many reasons for rejoicing in the removal of the School to Godalming. There at last we have a Chapel worthy of its purposes; there at last the Masters of the School have the privilege of preaching to their own boys, and in preaching are able to make the good of those boys their constant object, without fear of neglecting, or seeming to neglect, an equally important part of their congregation.

The mention of this disadvantage (if I am right in calling it a disadvantage) in our foundation, as it was originally planned by Sutton, has already led me on to the second line of thought which our anniversary suggests,—the personal experience of school-life, which is indelibly printed on each man's memory.

There is an ideal of the English public school system with which we are all familiar; I do not speak of an ideal sketched out in any particular book, but of an ideal which lives in the mouths of Englishmen, and is a theme of frequent self-gratulation. According to this ideal, a public school is a place in which all the virtues of the natural man—if not all the Christian graces—are developed by the conditions under which the boys associate together. Courage, purity, honesty, truthfulness, are enforced by a public opinion stronger than the rules of masters; a healthy rivalry in athletic and intellectual pursuits draws out and perfects the powers of mind and body; daily intercourse with superiors, inferiors, and equals, removes alike shyness and forwardness, self-assertion and rusticity.

Of course, such an ideal is not wholly without justification in fact. There are tendencies at work, in all good

schools, towards the production of the several results which it brings together into so attractive a 'picture. But there are other tendencies which conflict with them, and often gain such a superiority over them, that the picture becomes thoroughly unreal.

Boys are not better than men, any more than savages are better than the natives of a civilized country. If they were, a question might be raised about the use of education and civilization. Particular vices, it is true, are observed among men of mature age, as particular vices are observed in civilized times and countries, from which boyhood and savage life are comparatively free: but evil passions are as rife in boys as in their elders, in the savage man as in the civilized. And in our public schools, as among savage tribes, there are fewer checks and restraints on the play of evil passions, than in the life of grown men and in civilized communities. I will name two such evil passions, cruelty and impurity. I do not, of course, deny that these evil passions exist and find scope for indulgence in mature life as well as in schoolboy life; but it is obvious that in the former there are many more checks upon them. Occasions for the indulgence of cruelty are in mature life comparatively rare. As to impurity, the restraints of society prevent grown men from parading their vileness, as boys will do, and poisoning wilfully or recklessly the minds of their companions. In our great schools boys are massed together without the restraint of an older public opinion than their own, without that restraint from the eye of their elders which is constantly upon them in their own homes. The chief substitute for such a restraint is the public opinion which grows up among the boys themselves.

What is this public opinion likely to be? I suppose

it will be the reflection of the opinion of those among them who have chief influence. The natural aristocracy of a school, like the natural aristocracy of a savage tribe, builds its title, for the most part, on the development of bone and muscle. The leaders are those whose bodily strength is the greatest. This strength asserts its own claim to rule, and maintains it (if need be) by compulsion. Further, bodily strength is usually accompanied by a kindred gift, which excites admiration, and makes others willing to obey: I mean excellence in the games and athletic exercises that fill so large a part in boys' thoughts. Again, certain mental qualities, which are in themselves honourable, are not unapt to be found in company with bodily strength. Courage, for instance: for what should the athlete fear? plainness and sincerity of speech, for the same reason: since the commonest motive for falsehood is timidity. But bone and muscle—the development of the athlete—has no natural affinity to intellectual power. Some—the Crichtons of their time—may have equal gifts of mind and body; and these of course are the objects of a special hero-worship. But such examples are comparatively rare. The biggest and strongest boys are not usually remarkable for their intellectual gifts; and, by a natural consequence, they are not usually remarkable for diligence in study. The public opinion, then, which reflects the opinion of an aristocracy of bodily strength, will be likely to set a high value on athletic excellence, a low value on excellence in school-work. It will applaud, foster, sometimes attempt to enforce, application to games; it will slight, discourage, sometimes persecute, application to study. Again, it will be severe on those faults to which its heroes have small temptation, such as cowardice and dishonesty; it will be indulgent to other faults to which

the predominance of the animal nature gives more occasion, such as cruelty and impurity; less indulgent, perhaps, to the former than to the latter, because cruelty is a vice, from the practice of which each individual of the mass, among whom this public opinion reigns, is liable to suffer, and because it is a common belief, that cruelty to inferiors in strength is near of kin to cowardice; but still, boyish opinion will put a wide difference between the heinousness of this vice, and the heinousness of cowardice.

I have attempted to describe the natural tendency of things in a community of boys left entirely to themselves. Of course, this tendency may be incidentally corrected by the circumstances of particular schools at particular times. A school may contain, not one, but two or three Crichtons, who may raise its standard and tone materially in favour of intellectual pursuits. Or, it may happen, that two or three of the boys most remarkable for bodily strength are as strong in virtue as in muscle; that they have brought with them fixed principles from Christian homes, and have set their faces like flint against a lower standard. Such boys, especially if they are not wanting in intellectual gifts, may produce an effect upon the tone of their school, which will last beyond their own generation.

Besides these contingencies, which defy calculation, (although, thank God, they may be expected frequently to occur, so long as English homes, and English fathers, and English mothers, are what they are now,) a machinery subsists in all first-class public schools, which is specially adapted to counteract the natural tendency of boy-communities to fall under the dominion of brute force: I mean the position of authority accorded by the Masters to the highest forms in the school, and to selected boys in these forms called at Charter-house moni-

tors. As entrance into these forms depends mainly on intellectual progress, this system establishes at once, over against the aristocracy of brute force, something like an aristocracy of intellect. It gives to its creation the support of law; and, moreover, the natural tendency of things, (since upon the whole the boys at the top of the school will be the ~~ablest~~^{oldest} and biggest,) ensures to this artificial aristocracy sufficient physical force to maintain itself without the need of perpetual appeal to the Masters. An aristocracy thus created looks naturally to its creators for the general determination of its action. The boys who are specially entrusted with authority are conscious of responsibility to those from whom their authority is derived; and they feel that it is their duty to uphold a standard which does not fluctuate with the general opinion of the school. They may do this more or less wisely, more or less effectively; but in some measure they will almost always do it; in some measure they will almost always endeavour to put down evils, against which the public opinion of boys left to themselves affords no sufficient guarantee.

This authority of the upper boys is the main security which we possess against the evil tendencies that exist naturally in a great school on the English system. Of course it is but an imperfect security. In the Under School, as Carthusians call it, these evil tendencies often manage to subsist, and to escape observation. Here brute force not unfrequently rules alone,—subject of course to the fear of notice and interference from the upper boys; here school industry is not unfrequently discouraged or persecuted; here cruelty and impurity,—gratuitous, reckless, shameless,—are to be seen at times in forms at once childish and diabolical. These evils among the lower boys escape entirely the Masters' eyes,

except in some signal instances of bullying; to a very great extent they escape the eyes of the monitors also. And, moreover, monitors cannot always be relied upon to check evil which does fall under their notice. There are evil times in schools as well as good. Intellect and intellectual energy is not an infallible guarantee for morality, though it is a better guarantee than bodily strength, or skill in games. The worst boys in the school may be at its head. They may even be trusted by confiding masters; and, although they will seldom act officially in the teeth of their engagements, they will often encourage, by connivance and undisguised approval, the very things which they hold office to restrain. Which of us has no abhorred memories? I have repeatedly heard an eminent man of science, (who had been educated not at Charter-house, but at another school of equal fame,) say that his recollections of school-life were so bad, that he doubted if he could ever send his son to any public school. I can enter myself into his feelings, while I dissent from his conclusion.

Reflections such as these may seem, perhaps, hardly appropriate for our present meeting: but it is precisely at meetings like the present that they rise naturally upon the mind: and it is not the preacher's business, certainly, either here or in any other pulpit, to put aside every thought which is of a painful character. Here at least, in God's house, we may own to ourselves and to God, that our school memories are not memories only of benefits received and honours won, of pleasant companionships and lasting friendships, but memories also of sin and shame. In that strange, self-contained, world, of which each of us formed a part, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, it may be fifty, years ago, which of us so bore himself as he would now wish to have borne himself? Which of us has no reproach

in his conscience for wasted time and talents, for cruelty to others^o or unkindness which deserved the name of cruelty, for evil example or base acquiescence in the evil tone which prevailed around him? We come here, I venture to think, on this day, year after year, not only to praise God for His mercies, but to humble ourselves before Him for our own sins, and specially for the sins of our boyhood. Well said John Keble :—

“The deeds we do, the words we say,
Into still air they seem to fleet,
We count them ever past ;
But they shall last,
In the dread judgment they
And we shall meet.”

We can never undo them, or unsay them. We can only look to God for their pardon. But we can do something to help others, who have to face a like ordeal to that which proved too fiery for ourselves. One thing which we can do, and ought to do, is to resist the common fashion of glorifying an imperfect system. The system of our English public schools may be usually, as I believe it is, a safer system, in respect of soul and body, heart and intellect, than education in a parent's house, or education in a school after the French model in which surveillance is perpetual; but it is a system which has great dangers of its own. To remember these dangers, to avow them, to support every well-considered endeavour for their limitation, is a duty we owe to God and to our children, and not least to our public schools themselves, and to the good men who founded them. It is to the Masters of our schools that we must look for their improvement in all departments, moral and intellectual. It would be ungrateful to withhold the acknowledgment that many improvements have been introduced by English schoolmasters within the last fifty years.

While the general lines of the public school system remain untouched, the influence both of Head Masters and of House Masters among their boys has been far more widely and deeply felt than it was formerly. And that influence has told not only on school-work, but on the moral and religious tone of schools. I do not wish to exaggerate the effect of preaching upon boys. But I know well that the words of a Master, whose intellect commands the admiration of his boys, and whose life commands their respect, fall on boyish ears with a power which no other man's words possess. Fruitless, sometimes, at the moment, they bear fruit in months or years to come. And the mind of a good Master is made known to his pupils, and impressed upon them, in many other ways besides sermons. Well, indeed, it is that it should be so. To counterbalance that large share of independence which our great schools concede to boys, it is of the first importance that a Master's influence should leaven their minds, and so control indirectly those actions which it is not his part to watch and regulate from hour to hour.

But, if a Master's influence is to leaven boys for good, it is above all things requisite that he should be not only a moral but a religious man himself. Even so, doubtless, he may sometimes fail. Able men, zealous, moral, religious, cannot in this difficult work command success. Evil will go on round them, and under them, while they sometimes suspect its existence but cannot put their finger on it, at other times are without the least suspicion. Hard natures will defy them almost openly, cunning natures will deceive them, and bring disgrace on their training in after years. But this is the lot of all who have ever worked for the good of others; and no wonder. "The disciple is not above his master." Their work is not, however, really thank-

less or fruitless. On the contrary, there is perhaps no work for others done upon the earth, which bears surer or larger fruit than the schoolmaster's; if, possessing the gifts of nature and education which his employment requires, he does his work in the true love of God and man. Such a Master has a rich reward in the enduring affection of his pupils; he has a richer reward still in the sight of their development after they have parted from him. Many a jest have I heard levelled at a much-loved Master of another school, whose time of service has been long over, because he garnished his study wall with the well-known text: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." But his meaning was deeper than young minds realised; and his text had no inappropriate application. A Master who cultivates the intellects only of his pupils finds no small pleasure in their intellectual achievements at the Universities, or in after life. A Master who recognises God's work in the work which he has undertaken sees with overflowing happiness his old scholars serving God faithfully in Church and State,—brilliantly, if their natural gifts were brilliant; if they were not brilliant, then according to their power,—and holding fast, through evil report and good report, to the true principles of Christian manhood which he strove to form in them. And they, for their parts, are seldom slack to remember his early lessons. Often indeed, because he first impressed them with a just notion of the things which make life worth living, their memories invest his teaching with a power which he never dared to hope that it would possess.

We need for our children, amid the dangers of our English schools, all the help that Masters' influence can give: we must be careful as parents not to di-

minish that influence; not to thwart, harass, lightly rebel against those who exert it. Of course we must do more. Before our children leave home to enter the school world, we must do our best, by precept and example, so to form them that they may be docile for good at school, and resolute against evil. That is our great time for influence. When they return to us as schoolboys, we shall often find that the time for our direct influence is past. They will have become parts, as it were, of another world. The opinion of their schoolfellows, or of their masters, or of both, will have taken the place of our opinion as a determining force in their minds. But even then, if our advice has lost its power, it will not be so with our example. What the boy sees at home will tell upon him, even though he has ceased to mind what he hears there;—if it is good, for good; if it is evil, for evil. It is the existence of pure Christian homes, which makes the freedom of our school communities tolerable; it is the children of such homes who find school life, with all its trials, a wholesome discipline; who learn patience from its hardships without learning cruelty; who learn courtesy and tolerance without learning indifference; who are not corrupted by the knowledge of evil, but are prepared by it for the temptations of riper years; who stand out in all our memories as the types of English boyhood, and lead us to prefer, above other systems of education, that system under which they were trained.



